



Complaining and apologizing

Lesson code: QVRH-C2A8-TN45

INTERMEDIATE

1 Warm-up

Read the following text. How far would you agree with the points raised? Have you experienced the situations described below from the point of view of a customer or business?

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Many business people regard a customer complaint as a negative experience. However, if your business handles complaints properly, previously unhappy customers may start singing your praises. Consider a complaint as one of the best opportunities you have to show your commitment to creating another satisfied customer. Customer loyalty is one of the biggest assets a business has; fight for this loyalty - be passionate about it!

Complaints should be handled sympathetically and promptly. Some businesses believe that if they don't receive many complaints, their customers must be satisfied. Wrong! Only a few customers will complain to you. The majority will not return to your business and will tell others of their bad experience.

WHY SHOULD YOUR BUSINESS WELCOME COMPLAINTS?

Some published statistics say that:

- a typical business hears from only 4% of its dissatisfied customers; the other 96% just go quietly away and 91% of them will never come back;
- a typical dissatisfied customer tells more than 8 people about his or her problem;
- 7 out of 10 complaining customers will do business with you again if you resolve the complaint favourably.

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Try putting the following points into practice:

- Set up a complaints handling system and train your staff to handle complaints well;
- Make it easy for customers to lodge a complaint;
- Welcome customer complaints and deal with complaints promptly.

The above extract is adapted from a Consumer Affairs Factsheet by the Australian Department of Justice Northern Territory Government.



Find words and phrases in the text which mean:

1. take action in order to solve a problem (two synonyms): _____
2. showing your approval (idiom): _____
3. willingness to give your time and energy to something (noun): _____
4. useful qualities or advantages (plural noun): _____
5. repeatedly purchasing goods or services from one company; not changing for another company (phrase): _____
6. immediately (adverb): _____
7. not satisfied (adjective): _____
8. to your advantage (adverb): _____
9. make an official complaint (phrase): _____

2 Typical complaints

Look at the following typical reasons for complaining in business. Match them to the possible excuses/reasons on the right:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. damaged goods | a. a delay at the border |
| 2. goods never arrived | b. a lost invoice |
| 3. a late delivery | c. a missing order |
| 4. an overcharge | d. an accounting error |
| 5. an overdue payment | e. bad handling |
| 6. lack of customer service | f. business is short-staffed |

Listen to four dialogues. Which complaint/excuse did you hear in each dialogue?



What action was decided on in each dialogue?

Dialogue 1: _____

Dialogue 2: _____

Dialogue 3: _____

Dialogue 4: _____



3 Useful expressions

Listen again and complete the expressions from the dialogues:

1. I'm a _____ we h_____ a p_____ w_____ your latest delivery.
2. I'm very s_____ about that. I'm afraid our driver was d_____ at the border again.
3. Leave it w_____ me. I will l_____ i_____ the matter.
4. I'm c_____ b_____ we h_____ a p_____ with our order.
5. What s_____ to be the problem?
6. In what w_____ are they d_____ ?
7. I'm very sorry. This has never h_____ before. It must be d_____ to bad handling.
8. If you s_____ us back the d_____ sets, we'll send you r_____ immediately and g_____ you a d_____ on your next order.
9. I a_____ again for any i_____ caused.
10. I'm c_____ about a m_____ on our invoice. It l_____ like you have o_____ us by \$50.
11. I'm s_____ about this. Our accounts department m_____ h_____ made a small mistake when they processed your order.
12. We'll i_____ a c_____ invoice immediately.
13. I'm very sorry, madam. We are r_____ s_____ -s_____ at the moment.
14. Please w_____ here and I'll f_____ s_____ to help you.

Put the expressions into the correct categories below:

- MAKING A COMPLAINT: _____
- APOLOGIZING AND EXPLAINING: _____
- GETTING MORE INFORMATION: _____
- PROMISING ACTION: _____

Add the following expressions to the categories above:

15. I'm just not satisfied with the level of customer service.
16. Sorry about that. It's probably a computer error.
17. Is it still under guarantee?
18. Can you be a little more specific?
19. What is the nature of the problem?
20. I'll take care of it right away.



4 Role play

Work with a partner. Role-play each of the situations below, taking turns to be the customer. Complain, apologize, explain and promise action where necessary, using the language from this lesson.

1. You ordered 100 laptops from your supplier, but only 90 were delivered. This problem has happened several times before. Call your supplier to complain.
2. You receive an invoice for cleaning services. The cost of the service was \$300, but the amount on the invoice is \$3000. Call the company.
3. You booked a flight with your regular airline. Your flight was delayed by 5 hours and you missed an important business meeting. Call the airline company to complain.
4. You ordered a crate of wine. When the delivery arrives, you notice that some of the bottles are broken. Call the supplier to complain.
5. You are in an office supplies store looking for some furniture for your new office. You have some questions about a few items of furniture, but you cannot find anyone to help you. You see the store manager. Talk to him about the problem.

